

## A BANQUET IN BETHANY

A Biblical Play for Easter by Jewell Ellen Smith

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"...Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany.... There they made him a supper." John 12:1, 2

"Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment." John 12:3

"Jesus said: 'She hath done what she could.'" Mark 14:8a

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TIME: Good Friday afternoon, 1934.

Also, the week before Jesus of Nazareth was crucified.

PLACE: Marysville, U.S.A., a small college town in the South.

Also, Bethany, a village on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho.

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND: John 12:1-8, Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, cf. Luke 7:36-50.

CHARACTERS (in the order of appearance):

Eloise, a student at Marysville State College.

Mabel, Eloise's roommate, the niece of Miss Hattie.

Martha, a housewife in Bethany, the sister of Mary and Lazarus.

Mary, the younger sister of Martha and Lazarus.

Lazarus, a Bethany resident whom Jesus raised from the dead.

Myra, the wife of Simon the Leper.

Myra's Servant Girl.

Simon the Leper, a prominent citizen of Bethany.

Simon's Banquet Guests:

Jesus of Nazareth.

Nicodemus, a secret disciple of Jesus, a member of the powerful Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.

Joseph of Arimathea, a secret follower of Jesus, a ruler and Sanhedrin member.

Disciples of Jesus: Simon Peter, Judas Iscariot, James, John.

Amos of Jericho, brother-in-law of Simon the Leper.

Miss Hattie, Mabel's aunt and guardian.

LENGTH OF PLAY: About 45 minutes.

PLAYERS REQUIRED: 10 men, 7 women, no children.

SCRIPT  
Prologue

*Good Friday afternoon, 1934, in Marysville, a college town in the Deep South. Enter students Eloise and Mabel, who have been shopping and are loaded down with a large hat box and other packages. They talk as they hurry to meet Mabel's Aunt Hattie at the graveyard of a small abandoned white frame church near the college campus.*

*There is a bench at the gate of the churchyard. Inside the fence are many tombstones, some still tall and erect, others leaning, ready to tumble over. A part of the church is visible in the background.*

*The girls stop beside the bench, set down their bundles.*

ELOISE: Mabel, I don't get it. Why did your Aunt Hattie insist we meet her here at this old run-down churchyard? Why didn't she just come on to our dorm? She knows her way around campus.

MABEL: Well, you see, Eloise, this church conference that Aunt Hattie is--

ELOISE: Don't get me wrong! Your Aunt Hattie is a sweet lady, and I like it when she comes down to visit you, but this seems--

MABEL: I thought I told you, but maybe I didn't 'cause I got so excited over all the money Aunt Hattie gave me to spend on my Easter outfit!

ELOISE: *under her breath* You've spent it, all right!

MABEL: *continuing* You see, Aunt Hattie came down to Marysville mainly to attend a big church assembly, and that's where she is now. But she also came to make a map, or plot, of this old abandoned graveyard.

ELOISE. A map of this graveyard? You're kiddin'!

MABEL: No. That's what she wants to do. My Aunt Hattie, as the saying goes, "has a lot of irons in the fire." Besides a dozen hobbies. Right now she's president of the State Historical Society, and they've started a project of searching out all the old cemeteries in the whole state and writing down what's carved on every last grave marker.

ELOISE: Good grannies alive! I think that's ridiculous! Don't you?

MABEL: Frankly, yes. But Aunt Hattie says old tombstones are part of our American history.

ELOISE: Maybe so.

MABEL: Anyway, she asked me to help copy down what's on these markers. If the truth were told, Aunt Hattie can't half see. But she won't wear glasses 'cause she says they'd make her look old and she doesn't want anybody to think she's getting old.

ELOISE: How old is she?

MABEL: There's no tellin'. But I know she'll never see fifty again.

ELOISE: Grief! That is old. I just thought she had come to spend Easter and to let you go on a shopping spree. I can't wait to see you in your new outfit--'specially that hat. It's a dream. Will you let me try it on?

MABEL: Sure!

*Mabel takes large, elaborate picture hat out of box, hands it to Eloise. Eloise admires the ring of flowers on the brim, strokes the dangling velvet ribbons. Finally she puts it on.*

ELOISE: Ah, it feels so elegant. How do I look?

MABEL: Real pretty. I mean it, it looks good on you.

ELOISE: Mabel, I wish sometimes that I went to church every Sunday, like you do. If I did, I'd have to have lots of pretty hats and fancy dresses.

I don't have an Aunt Hattie to buy 'em. But my daddy would do it if I asked him and said "Pretty please, Papa!"

That's the way I get Daddy to do things. I say "Pretty please, Papa!" and give him a big hug and a kiss!

Every time, he laughs and says : "Of course, Sugar--whatever you want.... Child, you're the spittin' image of your mother! Just Marie made over."

MABEL: Your mother's name was Marie?

ELOISE: "Marie Eloise." She always went to church.

MABEL: *looking at wristwatch* I can't imagine what's keeping Aunt Hattie. I need to get back to the dorm and do some studying. My bloomin' math exam is the first thing Monday morning.

ELOISE: It is getting late. *eases hat back into its box* I'll tell you what: let's go ahead and be copying down what's on these tombstones here in the front corner.

MABEL: That makes sense. Come on. Let's hope I've got some kind of paper in my purse. *scrambles into purse, finds none* Aw, fiddlesticks! I don't have a scribble of paper.

ELOISE: What about this dress box and one of these shoeboxes? We could write on them.

MABEL: Sure. Here. Here's you a pencil.

*Girls take box tops, enter graveyard and begin copying information from tombstones.*

ELOISE: Your aunt wants us to copy everything?

MABEL: That's what she said. Hey, listen to this one. *reads* "Elvira McCorvey, beloved wife of Elton M. McCorvey. Born May 2, 1860. Died June 14, 1881." Poor soul. She wasn't but 21 years old. Same as me! Her epitaph says: "She Kept the Faith."

ELOISE: Here's another McCorvey. Must be Elvira's husband. Yep! Elton M. McCorvey, born July 1, 1850. Died June 4, 1885. "He has gone to his Reward."

MABEL: *moving toward center of churchyard* Here's a whole bunch of MacDougals.

ELOISE: *now in far corner* My goodness! Looks like everybody buried here was a Mac-Something! Here are three MacAlpins. Two men and an old lady named Miss Tourie. Wow! She lived to be 94 years old! It says she was born in Scotland.

MABEL: What kind of an epitaph did they give Miss Tourie?

ELOISE: Lem'me see. *stoops over, reads* "SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD." Then an S, T, period, the name Mark and a 14, a colon, then an 8 and an a. In 94 years she could do a lot, but what you guess that name Mark and the numbers mean?

MABEL: That just shows that her epitaph, SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD, was copied out of the Bible.

ELOISE: Oh, I see.

MABEL: Our Sunday School class studied that very verse last Sunday. It's about a teen-aged girl named Mary who was a sister of Lazarus and Martha. I'm sure you know who Lazarus was.

ELOISE. Never heard of him.

MABEL: Ah, Eloise! I'm afraid you don't know anybody in the Bible.

ELOISE: You're right. I know God made Adam and Eve, and I've heard about Jonah and the whale but that's about all. Who was Lazarus?

MABEL: Lazarus was a close friend of Jesus. And he died. And Jesus raised him from the dead--at his home in Bethany.

ELOISE: Bethany?

MABEL: Bethany was a village on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. Pretty soon after Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave--to be exact, it was just six days before Jesus was crucified--a Bethany man named "Simon the Leper" held a big feast for Jesus. Lazarus was a guest at this banquet. His sister Martha helped with the serving. And while the feast was in progress, Mary did a wonderful thing. She caused quite an uproar. Some there said...  
*voice trails off*

End of Prologue. Begin Scene 1.

Scene 1

*Scene 1. There is no break. Use spotlight to shift attention of audience from churchyard and college girls to the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany. The sisters are sitting in the courtyard. Martha is kneading a huge clump of bread dough. Mary is intent on arranging and rearranging fresh flowers and ferns in a pottery container.*

MARTHA: Mary, I do worry so about you!

MARY: Worry about me? What on earth for?

MARTHA: You've been fixing and re-fixing that bouquet of flowers for the last hour. You ought to be doing something practical! Like learning to make bread. Before you get married next spring you must learn how to bake bread. And how to run a household. After you are married you can't just dream your time away.

MARY: Martha, I don't dream my time away. Besides, flowers are lovely things. *holds up vase* See! These lilies are plain beautiful! *sets flowers down* Where is Lazarus this morning?

MARTHA: He has gone over to Simon's house. But you needn't try to change the subject. Of course flowers are lovely. But you can't spend your life holding lilies in your hand.

MARY: I know, Martha. I know.

MARTHA What I'm trying to say to you is you have to--

*Enter Lazarus. He is much elated over the news he brings.*

LAZARUS: Guess what, my dear sisters! Jesus did come to Jerusalem for Passover, after all! And tonight Simon the Leper is having a supper for him!

MARY: That's great!

MARTHA: Yes!

LAZARUS: Of course Simon's wife wants you two to help her with the serving.

MARTHA: By all means. Does Simon expect many guests?

LAZARUS: Quite a few. As you know, Simon has a good many connections in Jerusalem. He has even invited two members of the Great Council.

MARTHA: Two members of the Sanhedrin? That's surprising. Who are they?

LAZARUS: It so happens both of them are secret disciples of Jesus. One is a prominent Pharisee named Nicodemus. The other is a devout man, too, a ruler called Joseph of Arimathea.

MARY: Why would they want to be secret followers of Jesus? I'm proud for people to know he is our friend.

LAZARUS: Ah, little sister, you just don't realize how things are. We've known Jesus of Nazareth a long time. He is our friend. And we love him. We know he is the Messiah sent by God. When he raised me from the grave, he proved that. But in Jerusalem it's a different story. Jesus has enemies. His disciples have heard that even some members of the Sanhedrin have started a conspiracy to have him put to death. It's not safe for him to be in Jerusalem

these days.

MARY: Oh, goodness!

MARTHA: Let's hope that's just a rumor and that there's nothing to it. Who else did Simon invite to the supper?

LAZARUS: I didn't ask really. Of course some of the Twelve will be on hand. But most of them are still up in Galilee and won't get to Jerusalem 'till the day before Passover. I know Simon expects his brother-in-law Amos, who lives in Jericho. And me! I'm invited! And I can't wait!

MARTHA: As soon as this dough rises and I can get it baked, we'll go over and ask Myra how we can help her prepare the food. It takes a lot of work to get ready for a banquet. *exits*

*Mary moves closer to Lazarus, lowers her voice.*

MARY: You're going into Jerusalem this morning aren't you?

LAZARUS: I surely am. This will be one great day in the city. Jesus will be teaching at the temple. The blind and feeble and lame will flock to him, and he will heal them everyone--as a huge crowd looks on. I'll be right there at his side, listening to every word the Master says, watching every miracle. Oh, Mary, I truly believe he is God come down to earth!

MARY: He is. I know he is. Lazarus, will you have time to do me a favor?

LAZARUS: Anything you say.

MARY: *producing bag of coins* Now don't tell Martha. She says I dream my life away and that I'm impractical. Take this money--it's all mine--and buy me an alabaster box of fine, pure ointment. The finest in Jerusalem.

LAZARUS. Ointment? You mean "nard"?

MARY: Yes. Spikenard. Go to that market over near the Fish Gate and get the highest grade those Egyptian merchants have to offer. And don't let them pawn off any of their cheap, imitation stuff on you!

*Lazarus takes moneybag.*

LAZARUS: I'll buy you the very best. But this is a lot of money! What are you going to do with such expensive perfume? No. Don't tell me. I know! You're going to save it for your wedding next spring!

MARY: Perhaps, yes. Perhaps, no.

LAZARUS: Well! I must be off! This week the road from Jericho to Jerusalem is so crowded with Passover travelers that it'll take me at least an hour to get to the temple. What are you going to do today, little sister?

MARY: *with a sigh* Whatever Martha says. Then, I'll go with her over to help at Simon's house.

LAZARUS That'll be good. *exits*

MARY: *to herself* Yes. It will be good to help. Many people have given suppers for Jesus. But this one tonight will be the best one ever! I wonder how pure Spikenard smells? *Picks up flowers, exits*

### End of Scene 1

### Scene 2

*Late the same afternoon, in the courtyard at the house of Simon the Leper. All is in readiness for the feast, except for the last minute flurry in which Simon's wife Myra, Martha and Mary, and a servant girl are hurrying in and out, bringing flowers, trays of fruit, bread, pitchers of wine, and other foods.*

*The table is V-shaped, with 10 chairs arranged so that the top of the V is open toward the*

*audience. The V arrangement keeps the scene from looking like Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting "The Last Supper." Also it provides that the Christ Figure will sit at the end of the table--this so that his feet are visible for the anointing on right stage; that Simon will be in the center of the group; and Judas Iscariot will have a conspicuous spot on left stage. Simon has planned the following seating arrangement, going from right to left stage: Christ Figure, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, Simon Peter, Amos of Jericho, Simon the Leper, James, John, Lazarus, and Judas Iscariot.*

*Myra is carefully placing the large loaves of bread in front of the chair intended for the guest of honor, Jesus of Nazareth.*

MYRA: I do hope Simon's guests will get here soon. Bread is best when it's fresh from the oven.

MARTHA: Don't worry, Myra. Your bread is always delicious--hot or cold. *sets down wine pitcher, exits*

MARY: *holding vase of flowers which she has brought from home* Myra, where do you want me to place these flowers?

MYRA: Well, let's decide. They're so pretty! Hmm-mm-m. Let's see. You brought two arrangements, didn't you?

MARY: Yes. And I tried my best to make them look exactly alike. *lowers voice* Martha fussed at me for wasting my time picking so many blossoms. But I told her this banquet for Jesus is a special occasion!

MYRA: Of course it's special, and you and Martha are very kind to help make it so. Let's place one bouquet here. Then you can put the other one on that side.

MARY: All right. That will look nice. *Sets flowers on table, starts to hurry out, hesitates, comes back* Myra, do you have a basin? One that will hold water?

MYRA: Yes, I have a wooden one. Look hanging behind the door in the kitchen.

MARY. Thanks. *exits*

*Enter Servant Girl*

SERVANT GIRL: *cheerfully* Ma'am, the men are all here! All except your brother from Jericho.

MYRA: Good! We're ready! As for my poor brother Amos, he's forever late-no matter where he goes. Amos always blames his half-blind donkey for being old and slow. But the truth is: Amos is the one who is old and slow! *re-arranges some of the food*

SERVANT GIRL: Yes, Ma'am.

MYRA: Oh, I wish I could be sure Simon's guests will enjoy this banquet. I cooked everything I could think of.

SERVANT GIRL: They will like it, Ma'am. You're the best cook in Bethany. Everybody says that!

MYRA: Go whisper to Master Simon that everything is ready. And he can bring the guests on in. Tell him I don't think he should wait for Amos. My bread will get cold.

SERVANT GIRL: Yes, Ma'am. *exits*

*Enter Mary, with second bowl of flowers*

MYRA: Mary, Simon's friends have arrived. Please run tell Martha it's time to pour up the soup.

MARY: Sure! *exits*

*Myra fills wine glasses, exits, just as Simon is ushering in his guests.*

End of Scene 2

### Scene 3

*Scene 3. Same as Scene 2. There is no break. Simon is talking as he brings his eight guests into the courtyard. Their small talk among themselves fades as Simon the Leper speaks.*

SIMON the LEPER: My dear friends, come this way. Let us be seated around the table. I'm sure my brother-in-law will be along soon; so we'll not wait for him. Amos is always late, and, always laying the blame on his poor donkey.

Jesus of Nazareth, as guest of honor, will you please take this first place. *shows Christ Figure to first chair on right stage.*

CHRIST FIGURE: Thank you, Simon.

SIMON the LEPER: Honorable Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, I know both of you wish to ask the master serious questions. So please be seated here beside him. *Indicates chairs nearest C.F.*

NICODEMUS and JOSEPH of A.: *murmuring, but not in unison.* You are very kind. Thank you very much.

SIMON the LEPER: Simon Peter, will you please sit beside the honorable Nicodemus. You two can talk of Galilee, or Jerusalem, or both. Or, you can discuss the hated Romans, or the coming Passover Festival. Anything that pleases you!

NICODEMUS: Good! Simon Peter's fame as a fisherman has spread far and wide. I'll get him to tell me why the fish in Galilee grow so big!

SIMON PETER: That I will do!

SIMON the LEPER: This place we'll leave for Amos of Jericho. Judas Iscariot, since you told me you are obligated to leave early, we will let you have this place at the end of the table.

JUDAS: Yes, I have a business matter in Jerusalem.

SIMON the LEPER: James and John, not long ago I heard that Jesus the Master calls you brothers "The Sons of Thunder," But tonight you seem as quiet as the twilight; so please sit here, beside my friend and neighbor Lazarus. You will find Lazarus is a very quiet man.

*James and John murmur thanks, move to places.*

LAZARUS: Ah, Simon, you should also say that I am the most joyful man in all the world! All I think about is how I was dead! In the grave! And Jesus the Master brought me out alive!

*Group murmurs warm approval.*

CHRIST FIGURE: That was for the glory of God, Lazarus.

LAZARUS: Yes, Master. I know.

CHRIST FIGURE: Lazarus, your resurrection revealed to all men that I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies.

*Christ Figure sits down. Others quietly follow his example. Simon the Leper remains standing.*

SIMON: Now, dear friends, I welcome you to the table of Simon the Leper! Or, to be exactly correct I should say: "Welcome to the table of Simon the former Leper!"

But I was known as "Simon the Leper of Bethany" for so many years I'm sure the name will follow me all the days of my life.

This is a happy occasion for me. It is an event I have planned since the day our Master, Jesus of Nazareth, made me well.

When I was a child, my grandfather used to tell how in ancient times our ancestors were true nomads--wanderers, pitching their tents wherever the grass for their flocks grew greenest. And how they were a very hospitable people.

Every guest or wayfaring man who came to the door of their tents was welcome to stay

for three days and four hours for that was how long the tent-dwelling host believed his food sustained his guest.

Tonight you are in Simon's tent!

I invite you to enjoy this feast! Eat heartily! Eat enough to sustain you more than three days and four hours!

Now, our Master and Lord, will you do the honor of breaking our bread and blessing it?  
*sits down*

*Christ Figure stands, takes loaf of bread in his hands, looks up, prays.*

CHRIST FIGURE: Our Father in Heaven, the Lord Most High over all the earth, it is good to call upon Thy name, to give thanks to Thee.

Thou makest us to "rejoice and be glad in Thy Lovingkindness," *Psalm 31:7*

For the "earth is full of Thy Lovingkindness." *Psalm 118:124*

Father, Thou hast made us for Thyself.

We are thine, and

Thou art our God.

We extol Thee.

Hear us, O Lord, and have mercy. Let thine hand be with us. *cf. Chronicles 4:10*

Be Thou our hiding place and shield. Lo, it was said of old: "The Lord will guard thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and forever.... He will keep thy soul,"  
*Ps. 121*

So be it, O Lord.

Forgive us our trespasses, that we may not grieve Thee. Take away our wrongdoings ...  
"like chaff in the mountains before the wind,... like whirling dust before a gale...."

*Isaiah 17:13*

Take them far away.

Father, Thou art on high forever.

To Thee be all power, all glory forevermore. A-men.

*Breaks bread, passes it to the others*

*Enter Amos of Jericho, a bumbling tottering little man, well advanced in years. Muttering half to himself, half to the men at the banquet table, Amos heads straight toward the Christ Figure--much to the dismay of Simon.*

AMOS: I'm here! I'm here! Finally I'm here! Sorry to be late. Blame that one-eyed donkey of mine! Not me! It's his fault! He is the slowest, the most worthless ass that ever walked the road from Jericho to Jerusalem! If any of you gentlemen want the beast, he is yours! Now! Tonight! He is all yours!

*Simon hurries to Amos, tries to lead him to the chair reserved for him.*

SIMON: Never mind all that, Amos. This is no time to talk of giving away donkeys. Come, here's your place at the table.

AMOS: Not yet! Not yet! I want to speak to the Prophet from Galilee! I've got to ask him a question. Something that's been worrying me for weeks! That's the reason I'm here--to ask him something.

SIMON: Later, Amos! Later! We all want to hear the Master speak. You'll get your turn to ask questions. Walk this way. We saved you a place over here by Simon Peter. You know Simon well.

AMOS: Sure, I know the Big Fisherman. I know everybody here except those two learned looking ones. *points to Nicodemus and Joseph*

But it's the Prophet from Galilee I want to talk to. Let me ask him just one question!

SIMON: Amos, you're impossible!

CHRIST FIGURE: Ah, Simon, it's all right. Let Amos come to me. Let us hear what this aged man of Jericho wishes to ask.

SIMON: *half under his breath* Master, it's likely just some childish question.

CHRIST FIGURE: I have grown accustomed to questions. In Jerusalem this afternoon as I was teaching at the temple, scores of people asked questions--about everything from sending taxes to Rome to keeping sheep in Galilee.

What troubles you, Amos?

AMOS: Oh, Sir, it's about two stories you once told in Jericho. Do you remember the time Zacchaeus, our little short tax collector, climbed up a sycamore tree so he could see you pass by?

CHRIST FIGURE: Yes.

AMOS: And that same day you went to his house?

CHRIST FIGURE: I remember Zacchaeus well. A very small man. That day Zacchaeus came to know God.

AMOS: You taught us things by telling stories. And we said among ourselves "Ah, we'll never forget this!"

But now, because I'm so old, or so stupid--really both--I get two of the stories mixed up.

One was about a man who built a house on a rock. And the other was about a man who built a big barn.

One man was rich and one man was foolish.

But I can't remember which was which--much less why they were building the house or the barn.

Please tell the stories again!

CHRIST FIGURE: Often have I told those two parables. And many others. In the parable about building the house there were two men and two houses.

One man was wise and listened to my teachings about the kingdom of God and His righteousness and then did what God Commands. This man built his house upon a rock!

"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon the house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock." *Matt. 7:24-25*

The other man was foolish. He heard my sayings of God's commands and did them not: He built his house upon the sand.

"And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell and great was the fall of it."

AMOS: *nodding his head* Now I remember.

*Simon eases Amos into his chair.*

CHRIST FIGURE: The other parable was about a man, a great merchant and land owner, who was both rich and foolish.

This man could never understand that "the life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment ..."

He could not comprehend that "what gives life is the Spirit; the flesh is of no use at all." *John 6:63*

That parable, Amos, was this, and I tell it again for all of you:

"The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully; And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?'

“And he said, 'This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

”And I will say to my soul: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease! Eat! Drink! And be merry!”

"But God said unto him, 'Thou fool! This night thy soul shall be required of thee. Then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?'

"So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." *Luke 12:16-21*

Verily, verily, I say unto you: "Seek ye the kingdom of God."

AMOS: I will, Master. I will. And this time I won't forget.

JOSEPH of A.: Jesus of Galilee, My dear friend Nicodemus and I feel compelled to tell you we are your secret disciples. But perhaps you know that. We count it an honor that Simon invited us here.

CHRIST F.: I'm glad you are here.

JOSEPH: Nicodemus is reluctant to ask questions; but since you have answered Amos of Jericho so graciously, I think he is bold enough to speak out.

CHRIST FIGURE: What is your question, Nicodemus?

NICODEMUS: Rabbi, we know you are a teacher come from God. For no man could teach as you teach or do the miracles that you do, unless God be with him. Tell us how we can seek the kingdom of God?

CHRIST FIGURE: Nicodemus, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

NICODEMUS: Rabbi! What are you saying! Be born again. How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

CHRIST FIGURE: Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.

Marvel not that I say 'Ye must be born again.'

Consider the wind. That is what the Spirit is like. Swirling to the south, then to the north, or out of the east toward the west, the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it came from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.

NICODEMUS: How can this be?

CHRIST FIGURE: You are a master of Israel, Nicodemus. A highly respected Pharisee. You need to know these things of the Spirit. Moreover, you should know that the time draws near when the Son of Man must be lifted up even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.

NICODEMUS: Why, Master? Why must this be? Moses was trying to save his people from death! Those who beheld the serpent did not perish! But you? How--

CHRIST FIGURE: Whosoever believeth in me shall not perish, but have eternal life.

NICODEMUS: Oh, Master! I perceive that you speak of heavenly things as well as earthly things!

CHRIST FIGURE: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.... For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." *See John 3*

NICODEMUS: Will God not condemn the whole world?

CHRIST FIGURE: God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the

world through him might be saved.

NICODEMUS: The words you speak! They are Spirit and Life!

JOSEPH of A.: We rejoice to hear you, Master!

CHRIST FIGURE: When I say these things to the multitudes, there are those who believe not.

Many turn back and walk no more with me--even some of my closest who have said unto me "Lord, Lord" again and again.

Will any of you here at the table of Simon the Leper also turn away?

ALL: *protesting sincerely, some saying one thing, some another* Ah, no, Master! No, no!

Never! Not us! We won't turn away!

SIMON PETER: Master, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. "We believe, we are sure, that you are that Christ who would come, the Son of the living God."

*cf. John 6:67, 71*

CHRIST FIGURE: Yes, Simon Peter.

SIMON PETER: Lord, we have told you this many times. Yet tonight you seem sorrowful as if you doubt us.

CHRIST FIGURE: Tonight is my soul troubled. And what shall I say?

Shall I ask the Father to remove this cup from me?

To save me from that hour?

Forbid it! For this cause came I into the world.

I will say: Father, glorify thy name.

*cf. John 12:26-28*

*Passes out more bread*

*Conversation around table subsides as men become absorbed in eating. Myra enters, hands a platter heaped high with grapes to Simon the Leper. Martha and Servant Girl bring other food to the table, exeunt.*

*Simon takes the fruit, without comment, begins confidential conversation with Simon Peter.*

*Myra exits without seeing Mary, who enters from the other side of the room. Mary carries her jar of spikenard and a wooden basin. She stops just inside the entrance, half hiding herself behind a large potted houseplant.*

SIMON the LEPER: *to Simon Peter* What is the Master talking about? What cup? What hour?

SIMON PETER: I have no idea. Several times lately he has told us that he is going to die, that he will be put to death. But we Twelve--all of us--refuse to listen to that!

SIMON the LEPER: He speaks as "a man of sorrows," a man too much "acquainted with grief."

Here, have some grapes. And pass them on.

AMOS: *taking platter of grapes* I wish I knew what you two Simons are saying.

S. PETER: Ah, Amos, you might not understand. This food is absolutely delicious, isn't it?

AMOS: It is. Especially the fish.

*Mary goes quietly to the Christ Figure, kneels at his feet. Quickly she places the wooden bowl on the floor, removes his sandals, and pours the entire contents of the spikenard bottle over his feet. Then she wipes his feet with her hair.*

*The guests, absorbed in the meal, do not at first notice Mary. Only when the odor of the nard fills the house do the men seated on left stage begin looking to see what is happening, and, the women (Myra, Martha, and Servant Girl) come to the door to peep in. They are surprised, whisper among themselves, but do nothing.*

JUDAS ISCARIOT: What's that I smell?

JOHN: I don't know, but it sure smells good. Very sweet!

JAMES: It smells like incense to me.

JOHN: I'd say perfume. Or maybe burial spice. But to tell the truth, I've never smelled any burial spice. Except myrrh. I smelled myrrh once.

JUDAS: *standing up* I'll find out what it is! *sees Mary, grabs Lazarus by the shoulder, speaks to him under his breath* Lazarus, look what your sister is doing!

LAZARUS: *half-standing so that he can see Mary still kneeling before the Christ Figure.* That's Mary for you. Judas, my sister likes the old customs and traditions.

JUDAS: What do you mean?

LAZARUS: Anointing the feet of a guest is the ancient, time-honored way of showing him honor and devotion.

JUDAS: I say pouring out costly ointment is showing stupidity! And waste! Do you have any idea how much such ointment costs? A year's wages! Even more!

LAZARUS: Oh, yes. I know exactly how much it cost. I bought it for Mary in Jerusalem this morning. The price was 300 silver denarii.

JUDAS: You were foolish, Lazarus. All that money should have been saved and given to the poor!

JOHN: Be quiet, Judas! The Master will hear you!

JAMES: Yes, Judas! Hush! You don't care anything about the poor! All you're interested in is our money bag! Sometimes I think you are a thief!

JUDAS: I am not a thief! I'm a practical man. I hate to see money wasted!

JOHN: I don't know why we trust you to hold our purse.

JUDAS: *with mounting indignation* YOU want to hold it? Here! *Tosses leather bag of coins to John*

JOHN: *handing the bag back* You needn't get into such a huff! Be quiet. Now! Or the Master will hear you.

JUDAS: *raising voice* I want him to hear me! The money Mary spent on that ointment should have been given to the poor! Mary, what were you thinking about? Or were you thinking?

*Mary begins crying, runs to the other women, who are still clustered at the doorway.*

CHRIST FIGURE: *in gentle tone* Judas! Judas! Why are you bothering Mary? She has done a beautiful thing for me. The poor you will have with you always. But I will not be with you always. What Mary did was to pour this spikenard on my body to prepare me for burial. She hath done what she could. Remember that! Wherever the gospel is told, all over the world, what Mary did tonight will be told as a memorial to her.

JUDAS: I'm leaving! I've got business in Jerusalem! *exits hurriedly*

SIMON the LEPER: *standing* Friends, come, let us all go inside. Soon the night air will take on its sharp chill. Master, we want you to tell us more parables. Maybe one about the Kingdom of God?

CHRIST FIGURE: I will. Gladly. I will show you how the kingdom of God is "like a pearl of great price." It is like "a treasure hid in a field..." *voice trails off, as men exeunt*

*As the men leave the room, Martha, Myra, and Servant Girl gather around Mary. Martha hugs her.*

MARTHA: Oh, Mary! That was a wonderful thing you did!

SERVANT GIRL: Ma'am, it was mighty sweet!

MYRA: Just think! It will always be said of Mary of Bethany:

"She hath done what she could."

CURTAIN

## (End of Scene 3)

## EPILOGUE

*Scene is the same as in the prologue. Mabel and Eloise are still in the small churchyard, reading and copying epitaphs as they wait for Mabel's aunt, Miss Hattie. Eloise is much impressed with the Biblical story Mabel has just told of a feast given for the Christ.*

ELOISE: Gee, Mabel! Did all that really happen?

MABEL: The Bible says so. Fact is, the Bible tells about that banquet in Bethany in three different places.

ELOISE: The girl Mary actually poured that expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus?

MABEL: Yes. Just a few days before his Crucifixion and Resurrection.

ELOISE: And did Jesus sure enough say "She hath done what she could"?

MABEL: He did.

ELOISE: What an epitaph!

*Enter Miss Hattie, a plump, overdressed, much bejeweled, fiftyish looking lady who has a pleasant manner. She is out of breath.*

MISS HATTIE: Oh, girls! Bless your hearts! I know you thought I'd never get here!

MABEL: Well, Aunt Hattie, we were getting a bit concerned.

ELOISE: We've been copying what's on the tombstones, and we're nearly 'bout finished.

MISS HATTIE: You sweet things! *Sits down on bench, sighs* Well, I'll tell you what happened: our afternoon session of the assembly dragged on and on. Just as we were about to be dismissed, the new elder arrived. So naturally the moderator had to ask him to "say a few words." Mercy, me! That man talked for one solid hour!

ELOISE: My goodness!

MISS HATTIE: You say y'all have already checked through all these tombstones?

MABEL: Yes, Ma'am. And we found out most of the people were named Mac-Something-or-other. McCorvey. MacDougal. McAlpin.

MISS HATTIE. Ah, I should have expected that. I knew this long-abandoned church was built in the early 1800's by some Presbyterians. So that, and their Scottish names, prove that these settlers and their families were all originally from Scotland.

Oh, I tell you, girls, there's history in every old cemetery in this Country!

*Gets to her feet*

It's so late now, let's go on to your dormitory; and after we rest a bit, I'll take you both out to supper.

MABEL: Good! Aunt Hattie, I want to show you what I bought!

*Girls gather up packages*

My new Easter outfit is so pretty!

*Three start walking away*

ELOISE: Miss Hattie?

MISS HATTIE. Yes, Eloise?

ELOISE: On one tombstone I found the exact epitaph I want carved on mine, when I die.

MISS HATTIE: How nice. What does it say?

ELOISE: *reading from top of shoebox* It says, "She hath done what she could." The only problem is, I don't know what to do. How do you find out what you ought to do in this world?

MISS HATTIE: Oh, mercy me, Child! That is a profound question! Mabel, maybe you have the

answer.

MABEL: Not exactly. But I guess if you wanted to know what the Good Lord wants you to do in this world, you could simply say a prayer and ask Him.

ELOISE: Yes! That's it! Y'all wait for me just a minute! I'm going in this old church and say a prayer! *Sets down packages, runs lightly toward church door*

MISS HATTIE: Maybe I ought to pray the same prayer. Get God to tell me what to do!

MABEL: Me, too! *Two quickly follow Eloise, leaving their packages beside the graveyard gate.*

THE END

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